

RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN

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RHUS OVATA
SUGAR BUSH

Prepared
by
RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN
of the
Native Plants of California
Santa Ana Canyon
Orange County
California

RHUS OVATA

SUGAR BUSH

Anacardiaceae

Sumac Family

A large well rounded shrub or even a small tree, often 20 ft. high and with a trunk a foot in diameter. Bark rough, grayish-brown on old branches, reddish to greenish on young branchlets. Leaves alternate, entire (rarely serrated), thick and leathery, deep rich green and shiny above, lighter beneath, broadly ovate with an acute tip, slightly wavy, folded upward, the blade 2-4 in. long on a petiole $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ in. long. Inflorescence a terminal, short, compound panicle composed of several spikes an inch or so long, which in late winter, before the flowers open, are conspicuously colored reddish. Flowers small, $\frac{3}{16}$ inch across, creamy with tinges of red, especially on the outer portions of the calyx and corolla; calyx with 5 ovate sepals with marginal fimbriations; corolla with 5 spreading, ovate petals, these lightly hairy on their inner surfaces and margins; glandular disc at base of calyx somewhat fleshy; stamens 5, the anthers 2-celled; ovary 1-celled, bearing 3 short styles, but producing only 1 ovule, from which develops a flattened, rounded, berry-like drupe $\frac{1}{4}$ in. long and covered with a thin flesh, the surface of which is glandular and hairy, becoming deep reddish at maturity. Seed with a tough, membranous coat; cotyledons fleshy; endosperm none. In seedlings the cotyledons appear above the ground and the first few later leaves are coarsely toothed.

The genus Rhus (the name derived from the Greek word rhous, which was the name for some species of sumac) consists of about 150 species found on all continents in temperate and subtropical regions. In California there are 6 species, of which one is the familiar Poison-Oak (Rhus diversiloba), said by Prof. Jepson to be the most abundant shrub in the state.

Rhus ovata (the species name in reference to the shape of the leaves) was described in 1885 by Sereno Watson, botanist at Harvard University. The specimens upon which the species was based were obtained between San Diego and Los Angeles. This species is found in the interior coastal districts from Santa Barbara Co. to northern Baja California. It occurs sparingly in the desert mountains and extends east into Arizona. It is also known on Santa Catalina and Santa Cruz Islands. It is a typical large shrub of the dry slopes of the Upper Sonoran chaparral belt (areas with an average rainfall of less than 15 inches per year).

It is an outstanding green shrub at all seasons of the year, but in late summer and fall when many other plants with which it grows are dry and unattractive the Sugar Bush catches one's eye because of its fresh greenness. Although the species may be found in almost any locality in Southern California, it is especially plentiful and outstanding along the road from Temecula, Riverside Co. to Warner's Ranch, San Diego Co. The flowers appear in April and May and brighten the plants with their creamy color. By June the fruits are well developed and gradually turn a deep reddish color. They generally all drop by late July.

The Sugar Bush should not be confused with the Lemonade Berry (Rhus integrifolia) with which it sometimes grows. In Rhus integrifolia the leaves are smaller, rounded at the tip, dull green, flattened (not folded upward) and the fruits are strongly acid, whereas in the Sugar Bush the fruits have a sweetish covering, hence the common name.

Rhus ovata has been used to a limited extent with good success for roadside and park plantings, but is little known in private gardens. For many dry areas the ordinary exotics do not thrive, whereas the Sugar Bush, if given a little water the first season in order to establish it, will make a splendid growth thereafter without water.

Propagation of Rhus ovata is from seeds but, unless many plants are wanted, it is better to purchase them from a nurseryman than to attempt to grow them. Fruits gathered in July should have their pulp removed before planting. Immediate or fall planting seems to give best results in outside seed beds where the winter rains will start germination at the proper time. Germination can be hastened by soaking the seeds for 24-48 hours in water before planting. The seed beds or boxes should then be watered regularly. Nearly a year is required to grow a seedling to plantable size, but the earlier the plants are put in their permanent places the better, since the long taproot should not be broken. When the plants are grown in containers it is better to transplant the seedlings into a large can directly rather than to use small pots at first. With proper handling it is possible to get good results by planting bare root seedlings from the seed bed in January. Full sun, good drainage, little or no irrigation after established and little or no trimming will result in fine specimens of the Sugar Bush that will live for many years and which will look fine at all seasons.

RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN
Of The Native Plants of California.

Established 1927

In Memory of John W. Bixby

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Purpose: A scientific institution devoted
to the growth and study of the native plants
of California for their botanical, horticult-
ural and popular features.

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MAIL ADDRESS

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